

The Need to Teach Digital Genre in Vocational Education

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ABSTRACT

Genre consensus, to some extent, is affected by digital media, which some researchers propose as digital genre. This social dynamic requires adjustment and appropriation to teach designed courses in vocational education to stay relevant as vocational education is industry driven. This paper describes the practice of teaching digital genre in Online Journalism class. There were 23 third-year students of Diploma IV who participated in the class. During 8-week teaching and learning, there were five news articles the students composed by applying digital genre characteristics. Data were taken from participant observation in the industry, direct observation and survey in the classroom. Findings show that most of the students were aware of digital genre, able to practice it, and able to relate it to industry requirements. This paper suggests digital genre be inculcated in the class by analyzing its characteristics and having a hands-on practice.

Keywords: ESP; digital genre; vocational education

INTRODUCTION

It has long been discussed that the advance of media technology has implicated genre consensus (e.g. Yates and Orlikowski, 1992; Jackson, 2007; Pérez-Llantada, 2016). As now digital media plays important role in releasing content, traditional genre has been extended. Askehave and Nielsen (2005) call genre mediated by digital media as digital genre. They characterize digital genre as having two modes, reading mode and navigating mode. In reading mode, digital genre has linear flow from which audience can straightforwardly follow. It is similar to traditional genre which is usually distributed in printed forms. In navigating mode, on the other hand, digital genre performs as medium which has non-linear flow. In this mode, texts are interconnected and audience may have their own control on what text they want to access through hyperlinks.

As genre is the manifestation of social act to satisfy communication purposes, communication mode in genre plays an important part. In the digital era, traditional genre which consists of text alone cannot suffice. Xia (2020) explains that genre in the digital era incorporates multimodality. The role of other communication modes such as images, infographics, and videos is considered integral in digital genre as they support text in delivering a communicative purpose. Multimodality, as Xia continues, is in navigating mode.

Digital communication, to some extent, is subject to change. Grewal et al. (2022) argue that the dynamic development of digital communication occurs as simultaneously as the topic dissemination on digital media. The prevalence of following viral trends which often shift in a short time and the demand to stay updated can affect how genre is formulated. The formulation should consider what audience discusses at the exact time frame of the discussion.

In addition, digital media accommodates conversations among audience. Blogs and social media can be a good example where interactivity takes place. Audience mediated by these media can interact each other to discuss a topic. Belcher (2023) states that interactivity of digital communication affects digital genre conceptualization. Formulated digital genre should be made relevant to audience so that it invites conversation. Therefore, the concept of interactivity can also be added to digital genre characteristics.

One of the manifestations of digital genre is the products of digital journalism where news articles are shared on digital media such as news portal websites, blogs, and social media. As a result, it can be assumed that the formulation of news articles takes digital genre characteristics into account. However, the discussion of incorporating digital genre characteristics in digital journalism has been little conducted except a study by Song and Lin (2012). The study on digital genre has focused on business and professional communications as this area must make a swift adjustment to the advance of digital media to survive its venture growth (e.g. Suen, 2009; Lam, 2013, Anyassari et al., 2023). Meanwhile, the study on digital journalism lingers, among others, on online news format (as opposed to genre) (Thorsen and Jackson, 2018), platformization of news (Haze, Boczek, and Scharrow, 2022), and the relevance of digital news to audience (Bengtsson, 2023).

The research foci on digital journalism seem to provide little practicality for vocational students who are required to take internship at the industry as vocational institutions are industry-driven. Internship is a mandatory for vocational students, and they have to be informed on skills the industry needs before their internship commencement. Some industries which open to accept internship for vocational students majoring language such as Diploma IV English for Business and Professional Communication students (as vocational institutions are mandated to leverage its coverage to social and humanity science) are digital mass media. They mostly open vacancy for news writer. Therefore, this study was conducted to fill in the gap as well as to provide practice of digital journalism as one form of digital genre. By practicing digital genre, it is expected that vocational students can raise awareness about digital genre. Moreover, they can perform as the creator rather than as the consumer of digital genre. This study addresses three research questions. They are:

1. What are the characteristics of digital genre as perceived by digital mass media industry?
2. How do Diploma IV English for Business and Professional Communication students practice digital genre?
3. What is the student's perception upon practicing digital genre?

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed descriptive case study as research design (Yin, 2014). Data were taken in two settings. The first setting is online mass media industry. The industry is a private business located in Jakarta. It was founded in 2007. The media has been publishing online news article by strictly following journalist's code of ethics. Method to collect data from the industry was participant observation. The writer attended a five-day workshop in which she discussed and practiced digital genre. The result of observation was recorded in field notes.

The second setting is classroom. There were 23 third-year students of Diploma IV English for Business and Professional Communication study program participated in the class activities. The students were taking Online Journalism class while this study was conducted. Prior to taking the class, they had taken English for Journalism class and attended several public lectures by senior journalists. They had also practiced writing soft and hard news for printed newspaper. This experience of course serves as proper background knowledge to embark on digital genre. Direct observation and survey were data collection methods used in the classroom. Direct observation was done during eight-week teaching and learning activities from February to April 2023. Within the time frame, the students wrote five articles all of which apply digital genre characteristics. At the end of the eight-week teaching and learning activities, a survey was administered to gather the student's perceptions upon digital genre awareness, practice, and relevancy to industry requirement.

Data Analysis

After being collected, the data were then analyzed by using Miles, Huberman, and Saldana's (2014) data analysis flows: (1) data condensation, (2) data display, and (3) drawing conclusion and verification. In data condensation, the writer organized the data based on theoretical framework and the research questions. The data were then displayed in a table and a chart. Meaning was interpreted by making

sense of the data. To verify the findings, data triangulation and peer debriefing (Ary et al., 2006) were employed. In data triangulation, the writer used three data collection methods namely participant observation, direct observation, and survey. Peer debriefing was done by giving the interpretation to another fellow researcher to be reviewed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the result of literature review and participant observation in an online mass media industry, there are four characteristics of digital genre: (1) dynamics, (2) multimodality, (3) interlink, (4) interactivity. Table 1 below juxtaposes literature review and field notes.

TABLE 1. Digital Genre Characteristics

Relevant Literature Review	Informant from online mass media industry	Theme
Grewal et al. (2022)	Content in digital media is fast changing. Green content in the form of listicle and other informative tips is preferable.	Dynamics
Askehave and Nielsen (2005)	Readers/users play an active role in maintaining content they want to consume. Keywords and hashtag are an important determinant of good content.	Interlink
Xia (2020)	Infograph and video are integral.	Multimodality
Belcher (2023)	Content can be shared through social media to engage more readers/users. Social media can be one of content sources.	Interactivity

Those four characteristics were then used as the framework of teaching and learning activities. In week 1 and 2, students were introduced with the framework along with their application. Authentic materials in the form of English online news article written by Brown (2023), Paddison (2023), Hamdani (2023), among others, served as the relevant examples from which students analyzed those four digital genre characteristics. Pictures and captions in the articles were also analyzed to find their connection with the text. Students learned how to write an English caption used in a news article by applying the following formula: noun+verb (simple present)+direct object+during+proper event name+at+proper noun location+in+city+on+day. Why or how.

After students had been exposed to the framework and analysis, they practiced writing online news articles. There were five graded tasks they had to accomplish starting from writing listicle, soft news, and hard news. Listicle was used as the starting point as this type of article, based on the result of participant observation, is the most common in digital media. Moreover, listicle is the easiest to write because students can only list the paragraphs without any attempt to elaborate them. After composing listicle, students proceeded to write soft news and hard news articles which required students to elaborate paragraphs. However, the topics for soft news articles are considered lighter and more entertaining compared to hard news. In task 1 and 2, students were allowed to gather raw information from the internet to be rewritten. However, as students also need to learn writing authentically, starting

from task 3 to 5, they had to do site visit to gather real information from the field. Students had to provide relevant keywords, picture, and caption for each of their articles. Table 2 below lists the tasks.

TABLE 2. Task Description

Task	Task Description	Type of News Article	Status
Task 1	Writing free topic	Listicle	Rewrite from the internet
Task 2	Writing timeless tips	Listicle	Rewrite from the internet
Task 3	Writing soft news article about Malang Car Free Day (held on March 5 th , 2023)	Soft news	Site visit, observation, interview
Task 4	Writing soft news article about Malang City Expo 2023 (an event held from March 9 th to 12 th , 2023)	Soft news	Site visit, observation, interview
Task 5	Writing hard news article about Malang City Expo 2023 (an event held from March 9 th to 12 th , 2023)	Hard news	Site visit, observation, interview

All of the students' articles were reviewed and revised before they were finally published on Medium. This platform was deliberately chosen for article publication because (1) it is widely used to write English articles, (2) it has professional interface, (3) it is used by many companies to write corporate blogs, (4) it is user friendly, (5) it accommodates picture, caption, hyperlink, social media share buttons, and hashtag. The published articles can be accessed through the following link <https://medium.com/@3bbikbp>. After being published, the articles were assessed by using holistic scoring rubric adapted from Weigle (2002) for assessment aspects, Hajimia et al. (2022) for news report genre, and characteristics of digital genre mentioned above. Figure 1 shows average score for each of the tasks.

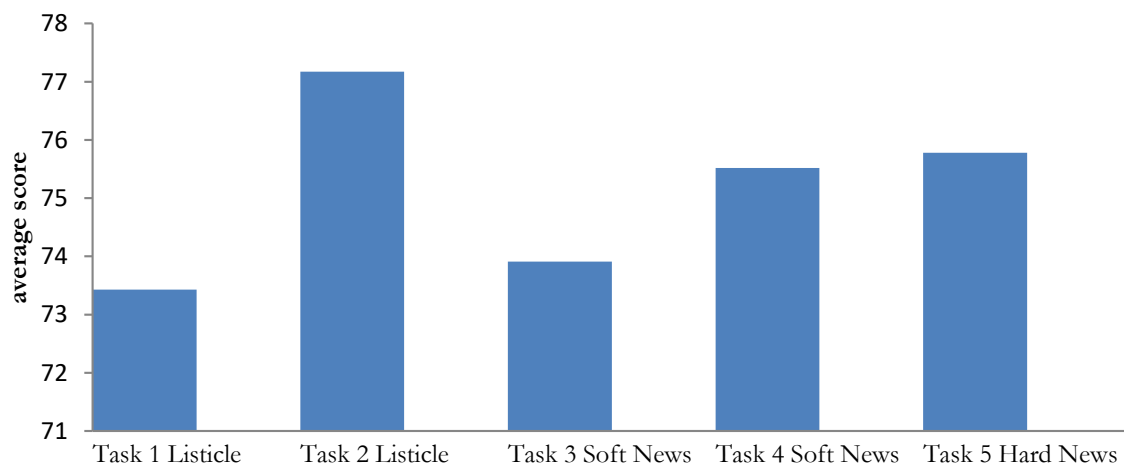


Figure 1. Average Score for Each Task

From Figure 1 above, it can be seen that students made improvement in listicle tasks by four points. Task 1 Listicle is the lowest probably because it was the first encounter of the article type. As it can be reviewed that in the previous English for Journalism class, the students were oriented to write articles for printed newspaper and listicle rarely appears on newspaper. Students also improved

in soft news tasks by two points. The improvement is not as significant as listicle tasks because in the previous class students had practiced writing soft news articles. Likewise, in hard news task, students directly performed well by achieving slightly similar score as Task 4.

TABLE 3. Student's Perception on Digital Genre Teaching and Learning

Questionnaire Items	Item Number	Response				
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
Awareness about digital genre						
1. I knew little about digital genre before attending online journalism class.	1	0.09	0.87	0.04	0.00	
2. My knowledge about digital genre has improved after following lessons in online journalism class.	6	0.52	0.48	0.00	0.00	
3. Digital genre is different from traditional genre in terms of navigating mode.	12	0.43	0.52	0.04	0.00	
4. Readers can control what to read and how to read through hyperlinks.	13	0.48	0.48	0.04	0.00	
5. Images are important for online news articles.	14	0.87	0.13	0.00	0.00	
6. When writing an online news article, I think of what appropriate images can support my article.	7	0.70	0.30	0.00	0.00	
7. Text and image should be structured collaboratively for an online news article.	3	0.74	0.26	0.00	0.00	
8. Interactivity can be neglected when writing an online news article.	24	0.22	0.48	0.22	0.09	
Adequate practice of digital genre						
9. Digital genre is adequately practiced in online journalism class.	15	0.43	0.52	0.04	0.00	
10. I am able to write an article for online media.	5	0.30	0.61	0.09	0.00	
11. I can adjust my article for online media.	9	0.22	0.78	0.00	0.00	
12. I understand the characteristics of online news articles.	2	0.22	0.52	0.26	0.00	
13. I practice the use of hyperlinks.	16	0.52	0.39	0.09	0.00	
14. I know how to create hyperlinks.	20	0.52	0.43	0.04	0.00	
15. I know why hyperlinks are needed in online news articles.	11	0.61	0.35	0.04	0.00	
16. I practice how to choose appropriate images for my article.	17	0.48	0.52	0.00	0.00	
17. I choose relevant images that support my article.	10	0.61	0.39	0.00	0.00	
18. I organize my article by foreseeing how my readers will read it.	26	0.22	0.61	0.17	0.00	

19. The chosen media to publish my article (medium.com) helps me learn and practice digital genre.	4	0.74	0.26	0.00	0.00
20. When publishing my article on medium.com, I always pay attention to the characteristics of an online news article.	19	0.13	0.78	0.09	0.00
21. Feedback on my article draft is adequately provided.	23	0.57	0.43	0.00	0.00
22. Feedback on my article draft helps me improve how I structure my article.	8	0.91	0.09	0.00	0.00
Projecting relevancy to industry requirement					
23. After attending online journalism class, I am confident in writing an article for an online media.	18	0.22	0.70	0.09	0.00
24. Topics and lessons being discussed in online journalism class are relevant to nowadays' industry requirement.	21	0.61	0.39	0.00	0.00
25. Articles on online media are getting more multimodal.	22	0.48	0.48	0.04	0.00
26. Text only has failed to attract online readers.	27	0.48	0.26	0.22	0.04
27. Online readers play active control upon what they want to read.	25	0.48	0.48	0.04	0.00

Positive perception upon digital genre teaching and learning is vividly seen from the result of questionnaire above as none of the students responded strongly disagree for all questionnaire items. Ninety six percent of the students who did not know about digital genre before (item 1) showed positive awareness in digital genre after attending the class (item 2). Their positive awareness lays on their understanding about the different mode between traditional and digital genre (item 3), multimodality (item 5, 6, and 7), and interlink (item 4). However, the students showed negative perception upon one digital genre characteristic 'interactivity' as 70% of the students agreed on item 8. This can be understood as the students were not required to use social media to share their articles.

The students also showed positive perception upon adequate practice of digital genre during teaching and learning in the class as more than 90% of them agreed on item 9, 10, and 11. Their positive perception includes the practice of interlink (item 13, 14, and 15), the practice of multimodality (item 16 and 17), audience awareness (item 18), appropriate media selection (item 19 and 20), and constructive feedback on their drafts (item 21 and 22). However, only 74% of the students had positive perception upon understanding of digital genre characteristics (item 12). This is in line with the students' perception on item 8 which showed less awareness about interactivity as one of digital genre characteristics. The students perhaps found less practice about interactivity which affected their understanding about digital genre characteristics.

All of the students were able to connect lessons and practice about digital genre to industry requirement (item 24) especially multimodality (item 25 and 26) and interlink (item 27). Furthermore, more than 90% of the students were confident to practice digital genre in related industry (item 23).

The findings on digital genre characteristics as perceived by online mass media industry are in line with previous studies such as Grewal et al. (2022) on dynamics, Askehave and Nielsen (2005) two-dimensional model especially navigating mode, Xia (2020) on multimodality, and Belcher (2023) on interactivity. However, some points such as the green content in the form of listicle, the importance of keywords and hashtag, and social media as news source ignite further discussions.

The findings on digital genre teaching and learning are in line with what Belcher (2023) has suggested. Knowing the complexity of digital genre, teachers should introduce navigating mode in addition to reading mode. The new concept of non-linearity should be well understood by students as it will affect how digital genre is formulated. Moreover, the indispensable multimodality element in digital genre should be projected in the students' mind while they are writing content. Multimodality has to support communicative purpose rather than garnish the text.

CONCLUSION

This study shows the characteristics of digital genre by using digital journalism as a case. The characteristics as perceived by the online mass media industry align with what previous experts have discussed. The incorporation of genre as the basis of teaching digital genre has helped vocational students' awareness on how to create online news article. The understanding of digital genre is needed for vocational students as they have to take internship at, among others, online mass media industry. By having good understanding on characteristics of digital genre, it is expected that these students can create a good and well-structured content to achieve intended communicative purpose.

This study, however, focused more on two characteristics of digital genre in Online Journalism class. One characteristic, that is dynamics, was not pondered in the class as students' articles had to pass review-revision session. Another characteristic, that is interactivity, was little practiced as it becomes the topic taught in the following week. Therefore, future study may focus on these two characteristics in order to enrich digital genre discussion.

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